

August 21, 2013

Key Findings:

- The Community Development Committee of the CEC has undertaken a review of current and potential cooperation between the Springfield Mass Transit District and area public schools.
- The CEC finds that the resources and expertise needed to fully research and validate a recommendation and implementation strategy in this research area are beyond its current scope and capacity.
- The Committee submits this report of its research for future review and consideration.

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Citizens' Efficiency Commission Research Report: Public Transit and School District Cooperation

Introduction

This report represents formal documentation of the research efforts of the Citizens' Efficiency Commission's Community Development Committee. All information has been compiled, researched, and verified by the Committee, its volunteers, and SSCRPC staff. The Committee expresses its hope that relevant local leaders will review the report and consider the alternatives presented.

Background

The cost of student transportation is often a major component of local school district spending. This being the case, during the summer of 2012, members of the CEC began to discuss the impact that decreases in federal funding for public school transportation might have on school districts in the region in light of rising fuel prices. This discussion was seen as being generally pertinent to all school district expenditures in Sangamon County, but particularly pertinent to the region's largest school district, Springfield School District No. 186 (hereafter, "the District" or "District 186").

Increased transportation budgetary pressures were viewed as being particularly relevant to District 186 because, at the time of the CEC's discussion, it had recently contracted with First Student for public education transportation services.¹ In 2011, transportation accounted for just over 5% of Springfield School District 186's total program expenses.² Given the two factors noted above and Springfield District 186's reported financial difficulties, the committee perceived that school transportation may be an area in which cost savings would be of great benefit and should be researched.

The CEC's discussions also coincided with changes in administration at the Springfield Mass Transit District (SMTD).³ SMTD's new operations manager, Mr. Steve Hamelin, was formerly the head of operations in a transit district that provided consolidated pupil and public transportation.⁴

¹Beck, Molly. April 23, 2012. "Springfield school board restarts bid process for bus contract." *The State Journal-Register*. <http://www.sj-r.com/top-stories/x596779956/School-board-restarts-bid-process-for-bus-contract>.

² Springfield Public School District #186. June 30, 2012. "Certified Annual Financial Report for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 2011." Available at: <http://www.sps186.org/downloads/table/18124/District%20186%20CAFR.pdf>.

³ Schoenberg, Bernard. June 28, 2012. "Changes in works at Springfield Mass Transit District." *The State Journal-Register*. http://www.sj-r.com/top-stories/x417561312/Changes-in-works-at-mass-transit-district?zc_p=0.

⁴ Sych, Lawrence, Richard Senter, and Michael G. Mobey. 1999. "Cases of Consolidated Pupil/Public Transportation in Michigan." *Center for Applied Research and Rural Studies*. Transportation Studies Center, Central Michigan University.

This being the case, the CEC felt that much might be gained by his experience at his previous post.

The possibility of a connection being formed between District 186 and SMTD for student transportation was seen as being potentially fruitful to District 186 given the factors described above and the fact that it is the only school district totally contained within the SMTD service area. A potential connection was also seen as being beneficial to SMTD, as the CEC observed that SMTD has experienced a need for increased revenues at various points in its history.⁵ The CEC also recognized public concern with low SMTD ridership leading to high per-rider costs, and believed that cooperation with school districts might be a resource for increased public transit ridership.⁶

In order to determine whether the perceived opportunities for cooperation had enough impact to warrant a formal finding and recommendation, CEC Community Development Committee members invited SMTD and District 186 representatives to informational meetings. Although the CEC ultimately did not feel that it was capable of developing a fully informed and validated recommendation on the subject matter within its time horizon, it notes that there may be opportunities for increased cooperation, which should not go undocumented. The CEC also notes that increased use of transit for pupil transportation has been a recognized trend over the last decade in some mass transit districts throughout the nation.⁷ The CEC has compiled its research in this report in order to lay the groundwork for future consideration of pupil-public transportation cooperation.

Research Questions

As discussed above, the CEC's research focused on the feasibility of a relationship being formed between District 186 and SMTD. In pursuing its research, the CEC found it necessary to define and articulate the questions at hand, including:

- What opportunities exist for cooperation between SMTD and public schools in Sangamon County?
- Would these opportunities produce greater efficiencies or reduce costs?
- What challenges would exist in implementing a cooperative pupil-public transit relationship between the two entities?

Overview of Existing Services

District 186 Transportation Services

Springfield School District 186 budgets approximately \$8-9 million annually in its transportation fund.⁸ With these funds, it provides and administers transportation in

⁵ Presentation to the CEC by former SMTD Director, Ms. Linda Tisdale (October 12, 2011).

⁶ DeMentri, Vince (interviewer). February 15, 2013. "Waste Watch: Raw Interview with SMTD's Frank Squires." WICS Newschannel 20. http://wics.com/news/features/raw-news/stories/vid_80.shtml.

⁷ National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services. 2000. "Position Paper: Transporting the Nation's School Children [School Buses-Transit Buses]." Available at: <http://www.nasdpts.org/Documents/Paper-Transit.pdf>.

⁸ Personal communication from Mr. Rick Koopman, District 186 Director of Transportation (September 13, 2012).

keeping with Illinois statutory mandates for the students within its district. State statute mandates the following:⁹

- Free student transportation will be provided for all elementary and middle school students (K-8) living 1-1/2 miles or more from the building to which they are assigned.
- Free transportation will be provided those high school students residing 1-1/2 miles or more from both their assigned school and adequate public transportation.
- Free transportation will be provided all students on equalization transfer to another center for the purpose of further balancing the racial composition.
- Free transportation will be provided all identified Special Education and Vocational students.
- Transportation for field trips and other student activities shall be provided within established regulations of the District.
- Reimbursements for transportation cost per statutes for use of private vehicles.

As previously noted, in 2012, District 186 contracted with First Student to provide transportation services over three years for regular and special transport (e.g., field trips, preschool, and extracurricular) of students. The contract's scope requires that the contractor furnish all equipment necessary, including diesel buses with access ramps, radio systems, and GPS devices. The contractor and the District work together to approve routes. Service costs are calculated based on mileage for regular routes and number of riders for special event routes. The contractor also maintains a bus dispatch system and any necessary safety programming. The District receives monthly bills from the contractor for these services. For additional details related to the RFP or contract, see Appendix A.

Table 1, below, provides information as to the scope of the contract through a sample of the District's annual transportation demands.

Table 1: Scope of 186 Transportation Needs- Transportation Claim 2010-2011

Miles (normal routes)		
	Regular Student Transportation	1,216,070
	Vocational Transportation	56,001
	Special Education Transportation	907,776
	Non-reimbursable Transportation	79,144
	Early Start Transportation	125,600
Riders (special events)		
	Public School Students	6,973
	Non-Public Students	0
	Vocational Students	296
	Special Education Students	1,197
	Early Start Students	567
Fuel	Gallons of Diesel	330,680
Days	Transport Days for Regular School Term	171

⁹ 105 ILCS 5/29, as cited in Springfield School District No. 186 Board Policy, <http://esbpublic.springfield.k12.il.us>, accessed November 9, 2012.

Fuel Costs

District 186 purchases its own diesel, which is stored and dispensed at the contractor's facilities. The contractor credits the district \$1.00 per gallon of diesel delivered monthly.¹⁰ The District bids its fuel purchases annually to a single vendor. The vendor delivers fuel monthly to First Student facilities. The bid is structured so that the vendor prices fuel at the time of contract for low market price at the St. Louis terminal, and then adds the vendor margin and taxes. It is estimated that \$800,000 to \$1 million is spent annually on fuel purchases after the \$1.00 per gallon reimbursement received from the contractor.¹¹ The CEC notes that specific support functions such as procurement related to transportation may also provide future opportunities for cooperation.

Transportation Difficulties

In a series of conversations with the CEC, the District 186 Transportation Director, Mr. Rick Koopman, identified some of the major difficulties that the District encounters in its attempts to minimize transportation costs.¹² These difficulties included the following:

- As with many governmental bodies, District 186 faces severe budgetary constraints that impact several District services including transportation. For instance, in 2011, the District cut several school bus monitor positions for those buses without children with special needs.¹³
- Federal and State requirements for busing homeless students can create unusually long routes and increase transportation costs. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and the Illinois Education for Homeless Children Act¹⁴ mandate that a homeless child or youth is entitled to attend either (1) the school in which he or she was enrolled when permanently housed; (2) the school in which he or she was last enrolled; or (3) any public school that non-homeless students who live in the attendance area in which the homeless child or youth is actually living are eligible to attend.¹⁵ This requires the District to hold ultimate responsibility for transporting students to their "school of origin" even when living in a substantially different area of the county or a neighboring county, and can generate considerable expenses, particularly when students retain homeless status for an extended period of time.
- Area magnet schools cause cost increases in pupil transportation, since students travel further and in less consistent patterns to reach their selected schools. Similarly, federal desegregation requirements mandating

¹⁰ All contract-related information derived from the "Student Transportation Services Request for Proposals," issued by Springfield Public School District 186 in 2012.

¹¹ Personal communication from Mr. Rick Koopman, District 186 Director of Transportation (September 13, 2012).

¹² Presentation to CEC or personal communication from Mr. Rick Koopman, District 186 Director of Transportation (August 2, 2012; September 13, 2012; September 20, 2012).

¹³ Beck, Molly. July 9, 2011. "Springfield School District cutting bus monitors to save money." *The State Journal-Register*. <http://www.sj-r.com/archive/x2028114212/School-district-seeks-fewer-bus-monitors-to-save-money>.

¹⁴ 42 U.S.C. § 11431; 105 ILCS 45/1-1.

¹⁵ Illinois State Board of Education. *Policy of the Illinois State Board of Education on the Education of Homeless Children and Youth Overview*. <http://www.isbe.state.il.us/homeless/pdf/policy.pdf>.

transportation of select student populations to schools geographically further from their homes increase transportation costs.

- Poor sidewalk placements have created additional bus routes. In addition to the requirement to provide transportation to students more than one and one-half miles from their assigned school, the District must provide transportation for K-8 students within that radius if their route to school has been deemed hazardous. The one and one-half mile radius does not apply in situations where a route to school is hazardous based, for instance, on lack of sidewalks or major road crossings. The need for some of these routes could potentially be alleviated if the City of Springfield had a more complete sidewalk network.¹⁶ Certain intersections without sidewalks or crossings can cause an otherwise entirely walkable route to be designated as hazardous, requiring District 186 to provide student transportation.

Additional Information

The CEC took note of operational information related to District 186's transportation services as well. Mr. Koopman reported that the District uses Edgelog Software programs for bus scheduling. For regular routes, the District does in-house routing. First Student does special education student routing, and District 186 pays on a per-student (rather than per-mile) basis for special education transportation.¹⁷

Related to the history of cooperation between District 186 and SMTD, the CEC notes that approximately five years ago, District 186 eliminated one west side route for high school students in the area near White Oaks Mall. This elimination occurred as a result of additional SMTD coverage for this route, which is now considered a "tripper" service. The Federal Transit Administration describes tripper services as the use of regularly scheduled, open to the public, mass transportation services to transport students. This use is permissible only if the transit buses do not carry special designations, although service modifications such as fare collection can be made to accommodate students.¹⁸ Additional east-west SMTD routes in south corridor of the City could generate other like situations.¹⁹

Springfield Mass Transit District²⁰

The Springfield Mass Transit District (SMTD) was established by referendum in 1968 under the Local Mass Transit District Act (70 ILCS 3610). SMTD operates a fixed-route transit system. SMTD's budget is approximately \$13.9 million (FY13). Procedures for altering

¹⁶ Personal communication from Mr. Rick Koopman, District 186 Director of Transportation (October 24, 2012).

¹⁷ Personal communication from Mr. Rick Koopman, District 186 Director of Transportation (October 24, 2012).

¹⁸ Federal Transit Administration. 2005. "Public Transportation and School Buses: Questions and Answers." Available at: <http://www.fta.dot.gov/documents/SchoolBusBrochureJanuary19-2005.pdf>.

¹⁹ Personal communication from Mr. Rick Koopman, District 186 Director of Transportation (October 24, 2012).

²⁰ Unless otherwise indicated, information from: Springfield Mass Transit District. 2012. "About SMTD." Available at: <http://www.smttd.org/displayPage.asp?plD=13#>.

SMTD's boundaries are defined in the Local Mass Transit Act as well. Its fixed routes include 18 day routes (weekdays and Saturdays) and 5 night routes (weekdays).²¹

SMTD is overseen by a seven-member Board of Trustees. Its operating funding sources include state (63%), local (19%), federal (9%), farebox (8%), and other (1%, primarily advertisement and investment) revenues. With these revenues, it maintains a system of routes covering the area.

SMTD also operates a regional maintenance center for large-vehicle fleets of other transit providers in multiple neighboring counties.²² This regional maintenance center was designated by the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) as part of a pilot program, and IDOT has garnered an award from the Federal Transit Administration for the program. This Maintenance Center is noteworthy because it is a model for efficiency. For example, IDOT provides diagnostic equipment for use in the Regional Maintenance Center, alleviating some local equipment costs. Moreover, Regional Maintenance Center personnel hours and associated revenues from fleet maintenance offset expenses associated with hiring additional personnel for maintenance on SMTD fleet vehicles.

To provide transit and regional maintenance, SMTD employs 20 administrative personnel and 99 non-administrative personnel. These non-administrative personnel include ATU Local 1249 operators, mechanics, a maintenance clerk, and SEIU Local 73 operators.

Fleet Costs

A priority and primary challenge for the SMTD is the large capital cost associated with maintaining its fleet. SMTD's fleet includes 52 heavy-duty and 8 medium-duty coaches.²³ As of 2011, the buses in SMTD's fleet ranged in age from 27 years old to less than one year old. The useful life of a heavy-duty transit coach, however, is intended to be approximately 12 years or 500,000 miles.²⁴

Fleet transition is a major concern for the SMTD. As of 2012, 57% of SMTD's heavy-duty vehicles and 42% of its light-duty vehicles were eligible for replacement.²⁵ The SMTD also continues to consider opportunities for fleet size reduction and use of fuel-efficient or alternative-fuel vehicles. Since vehicles must be able to handle peak-hour capacity, there is a minimum threshold for the vehicle size of SMTD's fleet.

Transportation Difficulties

Beyond fleet and capital costs SMTD discussed with the CEC regulatory difficulties in providing public transit. The amount of revenue SMTD brings in its farebox per rider is eclipsed by the actual costs of operating the SMTD system. While state, federal grants, and local funding through property taxes make up the difference between actual costs and farebox revenues, there are very specific requirements associated with grant funding sources. SMTD needs these funding sources to operate because the actual cost

²¹ Presentation to the CEC by former SMTD Director, Ms. Linda Tisdale (October 12, 2011).

²² Presentation to the CEC by former SMTD Director, Ms. Linda Tisdale (October 12, 2011).

²³ Springfield Mass Transit District. 2012. "About SMTD." Available at: <http://www.smtld.org/displayPage.asp?plD=13#>.

²⁴ Presentation to the CEC by former SMTD Director, Ms. Linda Tisdale (October 12, 2011).

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per trip for SMTD bus rider is approximately \$9. This figure is based on operational costs compared to the current low density of bus ridership.²⁶ Restrictions from federal grants are coupled with highly specific state mandates and limitations of transit district authority. The CEC encountered concerns from SMTD that extensive changes to operations in pursuit of cooperative activity may be impossible based on these constraints. However, this does not minimize the importance of pursuing potential avenues for increased ridership where available.

Rural Transit in Sangamon County

Since 2010, leaders of the Sangamon County Board's Committee on Rural Transportation, along with community volunteers, have been taking steps to develop a coordinated transit system to provide on-call transit for all residents of rural Sangamon County, including the areas outside of SMTD's boundaries, and other counties. The Interagency Coordinating Committee of the Rural Transit Assistance Center at Western Illinois University is currently providing technical assistance in the creation of a sustainable transit system fitting the specific needs of the partnering counties, a system which will be called the Sangamon-Menard Area Rural Transit (SMART) system. The rural transit partnership program will assist local entities by reducing route duplication among the various social services providing transportation in rural area.²⁷

Although coordinated rural transit is not yet complete in Sangamon County, the CEC acknowledges the benefits of such coordination and recognizes the positive efforts of this partnership group. However, because of the on-call nature of the proposed system, which is intended to transport rural residents into the SMTD area on an as-needed basis, compatibility between rural transit and pupil transport functions for school districts outside of District 186 appears to be limited. The CEC notes that, should rural transit services be expanded, more possibilities for cooperative activity may arise.

Best Practices

Michigan Pupil-Public Combined Transportation²⁸

Local governments in the State of Michigan provide numerous examples of cooperative efforts between public transit and public schools. In both small rural areas such as Alger County (2010 population of 9,601) and in larger urban areas such as the City of Grand Rapids (2010 population of 188,040), public transit buses have been successfully used to cover varying degrees of pupil transportation needs.

Implementation of these programs ranges in complexity and degree of consolidation. For example, in Big Rapids, Michigan, the existing Dial-A-Ride program (DAR) run by the

²⁶ Presentation to CEC from Mr. Steve Hamelin, SMTD Operations Manager (November 8, 2012).

²⁷ Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission. "Sangamon/Menard County Rural Transit Initiative." For more information, see: <http://www.co.sangamon.il.us/RTI/default.asp>; Rural Transit Assistance Center, Institute for Rural Affairs, Western Illinois University. 2010. "ICCT Clearinghouse Transportation Coordination Primer." Available at: <http://www.co.sangamon.il.us/RTI/Documents/Handouts/ICCT%20Primer%20Phase%201.pdf>

²⁸ All information in this section provided by Sych, Lawrence, Richard Senter, and Michael G. Mobey. 1999. "Cases of Consolidated Pupil/Public Transportation in Michigan." *Center for Applied Research and Rural Studies*. Transportation Studies Center, Central Michigan University.

City informally provides transportation to a number of students outside the City limits. Parents living in these areas call ahead at the beginning of the school year and schedule routes and locations for the entire year.

More formally, Flint Community Schools and the area Mass Transportation Authority in Genesee County consolidated in 1991-1992 due to budgetary constraints and changes to the MTA's federal and state funding structure. Strategic planning efforts played a large role in the MTA's successful transition to the primary sole transportation provider for Flint Community Schools. The transition created substantial costs for the MTA, which initially purchased school buses on the open market. However, the school district substantially reduced its expenditures, and the MTA now has a more robust fleet of conventional transit buses, school buses, smaller buses, and transit vans. Initially, the school district purchased monthly passes for its students, but now it purchases an annual picture identification card that serves as a pass. Because of opportunities to pursue additional grant funding available to Michigan's MTA, transportation costs on a per-pupil basis have purportedly been dramatically reduced. Open communication, commitment to a plan, and training students on public transit safety are all important to the FCS and MTA consolidation's ongoing success.

Generally speaking, in these and other examples, efforts at consolidation or increased cooperation were successful in situations that included many or all of the following conditions:

- Failed referenda on property tax/millage increases for school districts.
- Severe budgetary constraints for one or both organizations involved in the consolidation.
- Attempts to combine high school student transportation prior to or instead of combining transportation for elementary or middle-school students.
- Partial services initially contracted and expanded on an incremental basis, such as providing special education trips or athletic trips first.

The CEC noted a reported difference between expectations and reality in the Michigan case studies related to concerns about adults and children mixing on public transit buses. In some regions, transit operators found that adults did not commonly ride buses during hours when the buses carried school children, but instead adjusted their ridership to non-peak hours.

Another point of interest was that, in many of the cases of successful coordination and consolidation, school districts were either providing their own transportation or had no transportation, which is to say that these districts were not previously in a contractual agreement for bus service. For example, the Grand Rapids Public School District contracts with the Grand Rapids Area Transit Authority to provide unlimited transit for high school students on weekdays during school months for an annual fee of approximately \$250 per student. This generated savings for the school district by reducing the number of students it needed to provide transport and purchase fuel. However, as Springfield School District 186 already has privatized transportation and does not maintain its own fleet, its savings may or may not be comparable. This is an important consideration when examining these best practice examples.

Illinois Statutory Limitations

Aside from the City of Chicago, the use of public transit buses for regular school transport occurs infrequently in Illinois. Illinois transit districts that are not Transit Authorities like those described in the Michigan case studies above, typically do not have fleet vehicles that meet Illinois statutory requirements for pupil transport. Illinois statute specifically requires students' regular routes be provided by designated school buses which meet safety requirements related to vehicle and seat height, seat cushioning, etc. The following excerpt from the Illinois State Board of Education regulation details the mass transit exclusion related to contracted school bus providers:

When a district has a public mass transit system within its boundaries, the district may elect to certify to the State Board of Education that adequate transportation for the public is available for students and not offer free pupil transportation (105 ILCS 5/29-3). In exercising the mass transit exclusion as stated in Article 5/29-3 of the School Code, districts do not have to pay any costs associated with this service, including tripper services.

The Illinois Vehicle Code (625 ILCS 5/11-1414.1) requires every student (grade 12 or below) enrolled in any public, private or parochial school who is transported in a second division motor vehicle (i.e. a vehicle designed to carry more than 10 persons) that is owned/operated by the district or under contract with the district, in connection with any regular route transportation **must be transported in a school bus**. If a district chooses not to use the mass transit exclusion and enters into a contract with a mass transit carrier to provide pupil transportation services, the vehicles used to transport students must be school buses and the drivers must have a valid school bus driver permit.²⁹

The CEC has concerns that safety and funding limitations might make completely consolidating public and student transportation in the area cost prohibitive at the present time. However, less extensive options may merit consideration.

Perceived Opportunities

Absent a broader review of public transportation functions, which is currently beyond the capacity of the CEC, there remain a number of more simplistic practices that could be implemented to generate transportation cost savings for public schools. The targeted sidewalk improvements discussed above represent one such practice. The CEC is aware that some efforts to gain funding through Safe Routes to School and other grant programs could contribute to these needs.³⁰ Another is improving upon current synchronization of traffic lights in order to reduce bus idling time.

Mr. Koopman also indicated that with the implementation of peak-hours routes targeted to schools' needs but also available to the general public (commonly known as "tripper routes"), District 186 could have some of its transportation needs for high school student alleviated.

²⁹ Illinois State Board of Education. "Pupil Transportation Frequently Asked Questions." Available at: http://www.isbe.state.il.us/funding/pdf/pupil_transp_faq.pdf.

³⁰ Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission. 2012. "Trendlines: Safe Routes to School." Available at: <http://www.co.sangamon.il.us/Departments/RegionalPlanning/documents/TrendLines/TrendLinesSafeRoutestoSchools.pdf>.

Efforts to expand SMTD's ridership density through increased public transit use by middle school students could also be beneficial. The CEC recommends District 186 and SMTD increase their communication and cooperation related to route scheduling. This could begin to be accomplished through sharing geographical and ridership routing software data.

Ideal System

In conversations with CEC personnel, SMTD Operations Manager Hamelin suggested that an ideal transit system in the SMTD District would include a "series service," with large, articulated buses traveling north-south routes, and smaller buses serving east-west routes, enabling coverage of the entire City. This service could also include a fleet of smaller, lighter vehicles serving tripper routes for schools. The CEC encourages thinking along these lines in future reviews of this issue.

Alternatives for Future Research

After reviewing considerations such as best practices and perceived savings in other regions nationwide, financial challenges facing District 186, similarity and dissimilarity in functions across the two jurisdictions, and perceived opportunities for cooperation and public sector expenditure reductions, the CEC can not adequately determine the appropriate degree, if any, of increased cooperation between public schools and SMTD for transporting pupils to recommend. However, it suggests that the following steps may be helpful when reviewing this issue further.

1. Develop and share a more complete understanding of existing services and functions of both entities.
2. Develop an understanding of statutory limitations on both entities that would preclude cooperation or make it more difficult.
3. Model potential SMTD pupil transport programs using school and transit district software.
4. Create pilot programs in which SMTD and District 186 encourage increased ridership on SMTD buses by replacing specific school bus routes with transit-only routes for certain age groups.
5. Consider opportunities for partial cooperation that would increase SMTD ridership or reduce District 186 costs without requiring full consolidation of pupil and public transportation.

Potential Obstacles in Review and Implementation

Although this report lays some of the groundwork on these issues, in-depth analysis of route comparability, equipment needs, and statutory requirements would be challenging. When it looked at a similar issue, the Bay Area Transportation Authority of Michigan listed the following as challenges to overcome when working toward a comprehensive combination of school and public transit busing:

- Trust between school district and transit authority.
- Cultural, safety, and security perceptions for mixing ridership.
- Safety qualifications differing by vehicle type and purpose.
- Providing unequal services to different student populations.

- Costs and funding support, particularly related to capital equipment.
- Labor issues and agreement among labor unions.
- State government support.

Among these concerns, the CEC acknowledges a major obstacle for efforts combining pupil and public transportation is concern by parents about the prospect of allowing the general public to access buses children are riding. Although this practice has been successfully integrated into other communities, the CEC acknowledges real and/or perceived concerns related to safety and welfare as an obstacle to implementation. These concerns had to be addressed in several of the Michigan case studies described above, even when transit services were utilized for high school students only.³¹

Finally, cost allocation difficulties could arise in the event that District 186 utilized additional public transit for students. Typically, families of schoolchildren receive free transportation from school districts. Efforts to save District 186 funding by increasing student ridership on SMTD buses may cause backlash in the event that additional costs for education become the responsibility of parents. Moreover, at the time of the CEC's research, District 186 had recently entered into a multi-year agreement with a private vendor, making major changes to its transportation structure challenging, if not entirely precluded for the time being.

Although the CEC does not initially find an easily compatible solution to SMTD's ridership concerns or District 186's budgetary problems in District 186's transportation needs, it emphasizes that this informational report should lay the groundwork for future review of creative alternatives for increasing SMTD ridership and decreasing educational costs, rather than discouraging pursuit of such options.

As always, the CEC attempts to identify and address themes with each individual project it researches. The most evident theme it uncovered in reviewing these organizations and their functions is the lack of communication between local officials engaged in similar functions. A primary example of this is the fact that District 186's transportation needs pertaining to sidewalk coverage and walkability of school routes are not taken into consideration in the local sidewalk planning and allocation process. To the CEC, it seems intuitive that Springfield prioritize sidewalk creation in areas where the necessity for school bus routes would be eliminated if walkable routes existed. Additionally, a focused effort in this respect would encourage applications for grant funding for sidewalks through opportunities such as the Safe Routes to School program.³² The CEC hopes that its efforts to review this issue will catalyze in increased cooperation and innovation among local transit and transportation coordinators and local governments as a whole.

³¹ Sych, Lawrence, Richard Senter, and Michael G. Mobey. 1999. "Cases of Consolidated Pupil/Public Transportation in Michigan." *Center for Applied Research and Rural Studies*. Transportation Studies Center, Central Michigan University.

³² Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission. 2012. "Trendlines: Safe Routes to School." Available at: <http://www.co.sangamon.il.us/Departments/RegionalPlanning/documents/TrendLines/TrendLinesSafeRoutesToSchools.pdf>.